

# Two Legends of the Newsroom Retire

"The Front Page" could have been modeled on the careers of Eddie Ballard and Jack Kavanagh, two News American legends who are retiring after a combined 90 years of news editing and writing.

Ballard, as associate managing editor for news, and Kavanagh, as afternoon city editor, leave the paper where they won reputations built in headline

type. No disaster, fire, storm, riot or murder proved too awesome for this pair, the veteran news hounds who produced the stories people talk about 40 years later.

Ballard is probably best known as the unflappable, forceful-voiced city editor who always called his reporters and editors "kid" whatever their ages and

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## Ballard Covered It All From Murder to Riots

I. Edward Ballard was 16 years old when he got a summer job as copyboy on the old Baltimore News in July, 1924 shortly after the paper had moved into its then-new building at Pratt and Commerce streets. After his graduation from college, he joined the staff fulltime.

In those days the commander-in-chief of the city desk was Col. Will Wayne, a hard driving editor who earned his laurels at Hearst's old Chicago American. Wayne assigned Ballard to the North-western police district, location of Pennsylvania Avenue's tenderloin district of gambling, vaudeville houses and gin mills.

"My first break came one day when a report of a disorderly conduct case came to the station house. The man making the commotion was just outside the building. When the cop went out to arrest him, the man shot the policeman dead.

"Col. Wayne was a hell buster city editor, who turned all his reporters loose on a big story, built it up with plenty of follow-ups and made big gains in circulation.

"The big thing in those days was scooping the other guys on a big story. I had a bachelor apartment back in the 1920s with two other reporters (from competing papers) and even though I'd eat them on a story we'd all be good friends," Ballard says.

Ballard contrasted Wayne's style with that of Andrew Banks, the News' long-time city editor who seldom raised his voice above a conversational tone. Banks was one of the few people who called Ballard by his first name, Ike, short for Isaac.

"In those days we were always thinking of new angles on a story, even ways to beat the police. There was great excitement about a big story and fierce competition between the papers. Reporters today just don't go after stories the way we did," Ballard says.

Ballard's reputation as a reporter was firmly established in the 1930s when he covered the Trader murder in Snow Hill, a story that he knew more about than the police or the state's attorney. He also spent 10 weeks in Crisfield filing reports when ice cut off Smith Island



I. EDWARD BALLARD

from the mainland and it was feared the island residents would go without food.

He narrowly escaped being hit by gunfire in the mid-1930s while covering the prolonged strike at the Celanese plant near Cumberland. The strikers opened fire on the National Guard and Ballard was caught in the middle.

In the 1940s Ballard was called into the office as a special assignment reporter and rewrite man, the writer assigned to handle stories phoned in by reporters stationed at the scene of the event.

Ballard was involved with several famous Baltimore murder cases, including the 1939 torso murder, in which parts of a slain woman's body began turning up in East Baltimore sewers.

The Grammer murder, where a stone was found lodged under the accelerator of a wrecked car in Parkville, proved to be the clue in a case where the cause of death was far from accidental.

In 1955 Ballard was made city editor

of The News American (then News Post), a position he held until 1973 when he became associate managing editor for news.

During Ballard's years as city editor the paper firmly established its premiere position in local news reporting. When a big story broke, he pulled all the reserve troops — from the society editor to copy boys — into action.

He "surrounded" the St. Rose of Lima Church roof collapse in 1967 and rushed the complete story, with impressive photos, into the paper's first edition in 45 minutes. His expert handling of about a dozen reporters, beat the competition by several hours. Many tributes from other news professionals followed, including that of The New York Daily News, which ran many News American photos of the St. Rose of Lima disaster.

The same technique served the city editor during the riots of 1968, where Ballard directed the entire staff in singularly impressive coverage. Almost the entire paper was given over to the civil insurrection with stories that detailed the fire bombings, lootings, arrests from legal and political angles. He also assigned special features on the people living in the riot areas and how the riot affected their lives.

Once again, kudos poured in complimenting Ballard on his handling of a large corps of reporters, writers and photographers in a strict deadline situation.

No incident in Ballard's career was personally so shattering as the death of his ace news photographer, Harold Spicer. Ballard was at his desk in full radio contact with Spicer as he cried for help seconds before the photographer was shot to death in his own car.

As associate managing editor for news since 1973, Ballard continued to gather news stories and work on a number of special projects aimed at improving the news content of the paper. He also took charge of supervising improvements in The News American's reference library.

More than one person is now remarking, "They just don't make them like Eddie Ballard any more." **continued**

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snapped at them to "get it right the first time." His style was to surround a big news story with as many reporters as possible, getting each one to relay an angle of the event.

Kavanagh, as his assistant, was the quieter, half of the team, the man who could get more done with fewer motions than a carload of efficiency ex-

ports. He is known for his devastating use of the casually spoken understatement and for his impeccable appearance — 6-foot-2 — silvery hair and sharply tailored clothes. As a young police reporter, Jack Kavanagh set a sartorial standard different from the image of the slept-in suit, soup-stained tie and sal-on hat.

## Kavanagh Was a Gent In Words and Attire

John Patrick Francis Kavanagh was born on St. Patrick's Day, almost as if the good saint had something to do with it.

Jack (as everyone calls him) Kavanagh has been nearly synonymous with The News American since 1930 when, fresh out of Georgetown University, he joined the Baltimore News as a police reporter. But the Great Depression intervened and as one of the newest employees he was laid off about six months later. In another six months he picked up a similar job with the old Baltimore Post, the News' afternoon competition until 1934 until the papers merged to become the News Post.

Kavanagh's big exclusive story for the Post was his eyewitness coverage of Maryland's last lynching in 1933, the only Baltimore reporter to be on the scene in Princess Anne.

Acting on a tip from some well placed police sources, Kavanagh stayed on the job on the Eastern Shore after the regular Baltimore press contingent had returned home. The night of Oct. 19, 1933 he watched an angry mob of 2,000 persons storm the jail holding a man accused of raping an elderly woman, seize the prisoner and drag his body through the streets and finally hang him from the house of the judge who was to decide the case.

Kavanagh was also assigned to the subsequent arrest and trial of the suspected lynching ringleaders. He was staying at the Wicomico County Hotel in Salisbury when another angry group formed outside the armory that held the accused men.

When state police dispersed the crowd, it turned on the reporters at the hotel, threatening to harm them for the lynching coverage. Kavanagh escaped through a back entrance and automobile waiting to get him off the Eastern Shore.

Through the 1930s he continued to cover local news, particularly police and fire stories, gaining respect among local newspaper men.

Though his specialty was always con-



JACK KAVANAGH

sidered fire reporting, he was covered 25 hangings and the last public execution in Maryland in the course of his police work.

One of the most noticeable things about Jack Kavanagh's presence at The News American has been his distinguished-looking appearance. In the days when most reporters thought a clean shirt was a luxury, Kavanagh was spotless, attired in a herringbone jacket, trousers with a neat crease, immaculate shirt and tie. He set a standard for the newspaper tribe.

During World War II he served with the Army Air Corps as a staff sergeant stationed in Ghana.

After the war he moved up to a rewrite job and assistant city editor in 1955.

"Sometimes it was hard to stay at the

desk when you heard the fire alarm going off in the office," says Kavanagh of his promotion to an in-the-office newspaper job.

In 1950 Kavanagh served as president of the Baltimore Press Club, a group of local newspapermen who met first in Lehmann's Hall and later in a Fayette Street clubhouse that was the scene of many a good time. An illegal slot machine paid the rent for the quarters.

Kavanagh was always known for his quiet ways and sober style of doing things, sometimes in contrast to more flamboyant reporters. He would raise a hand when driving with speeding photographers and warn "If the fire is worth going to at all, it'll be there when we get there. So slow down."

His dry and often mordant sense of humor surfaced whenever he'd discuss politicians and the "mechanical marvel" devices occasionally installed in the newsroom.

He was his own dictionary of these marvels which include the "infernal machine" (a Xerox receiver device), "electronic television," and "frzoex type," his shorthand for the cold type computerized typesetting operation.

As afternoon city editor it has been his custom to leave a tersely worded but predictably humorous memo to the morning city editor. A recent one read:

"The honour of the presence of representatives of the editorial and photographic depts. is requested July one at high noon in front of the town hall in the city of Cumberland, Maryland, to cover the installation of the lord mayor and the city council. The ceremony will be followed by the sumptuous luncheon at the first hour past noon in the Shrine Club.

"You have been warned, (signed) JPEFK.

Jack Kavanagh is a man of few words, fewer motions and much accomplishment.